

**Seattle Urban Forestry Commission**

Work Plan

**Draft**

September 21, 2010

DRAFT

Developed with Brad Kahn  
**Pyramid Communications**

---

DRAFT

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission  
Five-Year Work Plan  
DRAFT  
September 21, 2010

## Overview

Established in August of 2009, the Seattle Urban Forestry Commission (SUFC), was approved by the City of Seattle as an advisory body to the Mayor and City Council. The Commission provides expertise in the protection, growth and maintenance of Seattle's urban forest, as well as advice to the Mayor and City Council in service to the **underlying goal of achieving thirty percent forest canopy cover in Seattle by the year 2037.**

SUFC is developing a five-year work plan and criteria for decision-making to guide its efforts going forward. This draft work plan was based on a facilitated discussion with Commissioners during a work-planning session on August 16, 2010, and on subsequent discussions with the Commission Chair, Vice Chair and City of Seattle staff.

## Purpose of the Work Plan

The overall objective of the work plan is to guide SUFC in its efforts to meet the City's urban forest goals. Specifically, the purpose of the work plan is as follows:

1. **Build focus and consistency** to SUFC actions and the motivations behind them.
2. **Encourage transparency** internally and externally about how SUFC prioritizes its efforts.
3. **Create a framework for prioritizing requests** made of SUFC by City departments.
4. **Support SUFC effectiveness in its advisory role** to the City Council and Mayor.

## Key Topics

Benchmarks and tasks outlined in this work plan have been organized based on five key topics the Seattle Urban Forestry Commission addresses:

- **Legislation / Protection**

The cornerstone of any urban forest protection and enhancement effort is legislation. This includes clear, consistent and enforceable ordinances. The SUFC believes trees and tree canopy must be the central focus of the legislation, rather than an incidental element. Trees are infrastructure and provide monetary and safety benefits, similar to storm water management systems or transportation systems. Rules and regulations to protect all of these systems are necessary to create and sustain a livable and vibrant city.

- **Programs / Evaluation**

Tracking progress and identifying trends, either positive or negative, is critical to ensure urban forest protection and enhancement efforts are achieving the adopted goals of the City of Seattle. In addition, having a clear understanding of the gain and loss in tree canopy over time will help ensure that adjustments to strategies take place in timely and appropriate ways.

- **Comprehensiveness / Effectiveness**

Successful urban forest protection and enhancement efforts need to be comprehensive and supported across the City's departments. Disconnected efforts and competing goals will limit the potential benefits. There are opportunities to improve collective understanding of how each department incorporates tree protection into their mission and how conflicts are addressed. Tree and tree canopy goals will not be easily achieved if they are not explicitly stated and given the same importance as other City department functions and mandates.

- **Engagement / Outreach**

Urban forest protection and enhancement will only be successful with public support. A transparent process that fully engages the public is critical to any urban forest strategy. The public must appreciate the value of trees and be actively engaged in tree management, to ensure buy-in at each step in a process. Public engagement also includes an effective enforcement policy, timely information sharing and information on how the citizens of Seattle can participate in urban forest enhancement and protection on their own property.

- **Organizational / Operational**

The urban forestry commission is a unique opportunity for the City of Seattle to utilize outside expert opinion on methods and strategies for urban forest protection and enhancement. Ensuring the Commission operates in an effective and efficient manner will be critical to its success and value to the Mayor and City Council. Commissioners and the public need a clear understanding of how work plans are created, priorities established, decisions are made and information is disseminated.

## **Criteria for Decision-Making**

*"There is hereby established an Urban Forestry Commission (The Commission) to advise the Mayor and City Council concerning the establishment of policy and regulations governing the protection, management and conservation of trees and vegetation in the City of Seattle."*

*- Enabling legislation, Ordinance 123052*

Because the enabling legislation is broad, the SUFC has identified the following criteria to support decisions about prioritizing requests and other commitments of time and resources:

1. **Impact on overall goal:** Actions that significantly impact the overall 30% canopy cover goal – negatively or positively – will be prioritized.
2. **Priority issues:** Requests related to priority issues identified in the Urban Forest Management Plan (e.g. stewardship of City trees or Seattle ReLeaf Campaign) will be given priority.
3. **Leadership requests:** Requests from the Mayor or City Council will be given priority.
4. **Geographic scale and priority locations:** Actions of citywide significance are higher priority than those focused on smaller geographic areas. In addition, parts of Seattle (e.g. Southeast Seattle or Ballard) that have been identified as priorities for planting will be prioritized.
5. **Timeliness:** Timely or urgent requests will be prioritized.
6. **Efficiency:** Actions that help the City increase the efficiency and effectiveness of efforts by coordinating and leveraging existing resources (e.g. in the budget process) will be given priority.

7. **Opportunity cost:** Actions that require significant investment of SUFC resources will be considered carefully, understanding that taking them on will require passing on other actions.
8. **Precedent:** Actions that set an important precedent will be considered carefully and may be prioritized.
9. **Longevity:** Actions that will have a long-term impact will be prioritized.
10. **Departments:** Requests from departments with significant tree management responsibilities will be prioritized.

## Priority Outcomes

While the SUFC acts as an advisory body, there are specific outcomes requiring action by many parties the Commission hopes to support and see accomplished. During the time period covered under this five-year work plan, priority outcomes include the following:

1. **Legislation / Protection:** Establishment of a strong tree protection ordinance, written with input from SUFC. SUFC recommendations should specifically include input on several key questions around permitting and inventory systems, the use of incentives and penalties, and the structure of the city's tree management within departments.
2. **Programs / Evaluation:** SUFC reviews data collected about Seattle's forest canopy, related ecosystem services and priority locations on a regular basis, and offers input about potential refinements, to help best manage resources used for urban forestry in Seattle.
3. **Comprehensiveness / Effectiveness:** Aligned goals to promote efficient use of City resources dedicated to the care and management of trees.
4. **Engagement / Outreach:** Recommendations on locations and issues around which to engage community groups and leverage resources, educate the public about the value of trees, and incentivize positive outcomes.
5. **Organization / Operations:** The role of SUFC is clearly established within the City, with shared understanding about when and how to engage the Commission on decisions. Within SUFC, the role of committees is further refined, to align committee objectives with overall work plan and purpose.

## Five-Year Plan: Key Benchmarks

### Legislation / Protection

1. **Identify opportunities for input into Tree Protection Ordinance:** Identification of steps for development of the Tree Protection Ordinance, including points when SUFC will have a chance to provide input.
2. **Identify goals and tools for strong Tree Protection Ordinance:** Development of positions to inform priority components of the Tree Protection Ordinance.
3. **Support passage of strong Tree Protection Ordinance:** Passage by City Council of a strong Ordinance that moves Seattle towards its goal of 30% canopy cover.
4. **Support implementation of Tree Protection Ordinance:** SUFC acts as a resource for the citizens of Seattle in the implementation of the new Tree Protection Ordinance by helping citizens understand the new ordinance and by tracking the on-the-ground effectiveness of the ordinance in meeting the tree canopy cover goals.
5. **Consider refinements for Tree Protection Ordinance:** Evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of Tree Protection Ordinance in the context of the citywide 30% goal, using new metrics, with recommendations about possible refinements.

### Programs / Evaluation

1. **Refine metrics:** Review and provide advice on the metrics currently used by the City to measure tree canopy, including recommendations about opportunities to strengthen data collection, analysis and application.
2. **Review data collected:** Based on a presentation made to SUFC by the City staff responsible for data collection, conduct an annual review of data collected to evaluate City progress towards stated goals.
3. **Develop “report card” of key findings:** After the annual review of data collected by the City, SUFC will develop a report card of key findings based on both the form and substance of the data collected, which will be delivered to the Mayor and City Council as a high-level progress report.
4. **Package metrics:** Advise City staff on how to best present data to the public in a format that is digestible, clear and easily available.
5. **Evaluate new metrics:** Data being collected by the City is being used across departments as a way to measure progress toward goals.

### Comprehensiveness / Effectiveness

1. **Explore opportunities to further align departments:** Work with staff from the Office of Sustainability and Environment and the City Council to identify opportunities to promote increased consistency in goal setting and action relative to tree management across City departments.
2. **Create a sustainable and realistic urban forest budget:** Work with City departments and the City Council to craft a realistic and appropriate budget to promote and maintain Seattle’s urban forest.

## Engagement / Outreach

1. **Support Seattle urban forestry programs:** Provide input to the Office of Sustainability and Environment about emerging opportunities and ways to refine the Seattle ReLeaf and other urban forestry programs.
2. **Annual Report:** Provide an annual report to the citizens of Seattle that describes the activities of the SUFC as it relates to the promotion of urban tree canopy goals.
3. **Annual Stakeholder Meetings:** Provide an annual opportunity for stakeholders to address the SUFC and its work plan or annual plan.
4. **Promote positive urban forest messages:** Promote the activities of the Commission and City departments, as they relate to urban forest management, to the extent possible.

## Organizational / Operational

1. **Elevate and communicate SUFC priorities:** Creation of a cover sheet using criteria for decision-making that would be completed in advance by any entity wishing to present an opportunity to SUFC.
2. **Align committees with UFMP and SUFC work plan:** SUFC committee structure has been shifted to ensure alignment with the Urban Forest Management Plan and the SUFC work plan.
3. **Explore opportunities to increase SUFC capacity:** SUFC considers a range of potential ways to increase the capacity and impact of the Commission, including partnerships, internships and other collaborative efforts.
4. **Develop five-year work plan:** SUFC has developed a new work plan to guide efforts going forward from 2016 - 2020.

## **Appendix: Input from the Work Planning Session**

During the work planning session on August 16, 2010, the Commissioners offered input based on the questions below. This section has been edited to remove duplicate answers.

### **What three things are necessary to reach overall goal of 30% canopy cover?**

- Significant incentives to single-family homeowners for keeping trees.
- Slow down the removal of trees on both residential non-developed areas and in development.
- Put obstacles in the way of people who want to remove trees.
- With 30% goal, question comes up where that came from.
- Residential seems to be the place where things can go, programs exist to add trees, industrial pops up as a case where we can't do anything.
- Real paradigm shift in how we think about trees.
- Think of trees as infrastructure.
- Opportunity areas in the city in SODO industrial area.
- City as a whole manages trees under one set of goals. Right now several agencies with different goals, resources, etc. Example: Miami every tree is managed by one agency with one set of goals.
- Create a Bureau of Urban Forestry.
- New procedures or metrics around trees, how many trees are getting cut, we have big projection, need more detail.

### **What specific actions need to be accomplished in the next 5 years?**

- Really good Tree Protection Ordinance, written by people who understand trees.
- Consider canopy overall as part of Tree Protection Ordinance.
- Canopy as a metric, should be a good understanding of canopy function and rules to make that happen.
- Tree Ordinance needs to be written from the perspective of the trees.
- Should not be about how to develop the lot, should be about the trees.
- A huge gap in knowledge exists about specifics about canopy, what are we losing, how much should we be gaining?
- That one department cannot write this alone, takes too much input, in order to get it right, should be a multi-disciplinary method.
- Need to incorporate arborist industry, most people that are removing significant trees are going to hire someone to do it.
- Existing tree protection should be prioritized.
- There needs to be real honest, deliberate decision and consideration as to what perspective that person who is writing the Ordinance will have.

### **Of the actions in next 5 yrs, which will most directly benefit the public?**

- Building public awareness and support and momentum, virtually everything city will do, affected public will come out to voice their opinion, those who have no opinions will stay home.
- Trees being appreciated and respected as infrastructure.

### **What potential benefits would the public recognize?**

- Incentive program for providing canopy.



- Direct financial benefit, credit on utility bill or property taxes, word will spread, trees mean money.
- The challenge is in selling the benefits of a healthy urban forest and raising level of public understanding.
- Much more of a PR campaign.
- Average turnover on properties is 5 yrs, astonishing that owning property for 5 years means you own a tree, cultural shift is necessary to move to stewardship rather than ownership.
- Public responsibility on private property.
- Look what's happened with commercial forestry on private lands, thinking of it as an ecosystem rather than seeing it as your private things you can do whatever you want with.
- Identify areas in the city that have the highest value from an ecosystem point of view, storm point of view, and then say this is a primary target for planting.
- On public land, we need to have priorities for public areas as well.
- Focus on incentives to use the right of ways, because this is the only public land we have in Seattle.
- Streetscape is the only place we can increase canopy cover.

#### **How would you describe role of the Commission?**

- Formed by Mayor and City Council to give them advice on how to deal with trees, we have canopy goal and how to reach it.
- Clearinghouse and advisory group on strategies to improve quality of Seattle's urban forest.
- Leadership in City of Seattle have a plan to implement and to ensure its success they have asked individuals with expertise to advise them on variety of issues.
- Tree canopy represents a piece of infrastructure important to city, delivers recreation, clean air, etc and we want to make sure it is strong and to enhance it and to do that the city has asked a panel of professionals to advise them on how to get there.
- Advisory group to city rule makers to help them talk about trees as important elements that make neighborhoods great places to live.
- City leaders realize value of urban forest, and created this group to help advise on how to protect and enhance.
- Advisory, clearinghouse, political, communications.
- Formed exactly to depoliticize the issues around urban forestry, we are experts, we can view more objectively, so its just to depoliticize.

#### **What criteria should SUFC use to prioritize its actions?**

- Stay focused on how to improve or streamline bigger policy and regulation.
- Draw out which rules were applied and how they need to be changed or not changed.
- We should stay at a higher level and try to streamline policy and procedures.
- We are the glue that holds the urban forest together through the political and beaurocratic ups and downs. We should be dealing with anything that enhances or threatens Seattle's urban forest.
- Geographic scale should be a factor.
- Order of magnitude too, is this an issue that will significantly impact our ability to achieve 30% cover? 30% as means of filtering?
- Potential longevity, when we are dealing with trees, had they not had forward thinking in 1968-70 we wouldn't have had ash trees on 35<sup>th</sup>.
- Get criteria from pedestrian master plan.

- Potential for precedent, to improve city policies, longevity.
- To tailor conversation to urban forest Commission.
- Tools to provide answers to questions that can help us determine priority level.
- Can we make a difference?
- Role of utilities is something we should always consider.
- I think we need to be more proactive.
- Timeliness is critical.
- I don't want this to be perceived as advocacy.
- Clear voice between individual Commissions voice and a Commissioner's voice.
- Our neutrality is undermined if we are seen as a "go at it..."
- Agree, also balance between advocacy and advisory, its all about getting a lot of fingerprints on the knife. No one individual takes responsibility. Groups right now want our fingertips on their knives. By that they have credibility.
- Idea of an abstract would be helpful in combating that.

**Are members of the Commission ambassadors? When and how should the Commissioners represent SUFC?**

- Balance there, I would like to see Commission as more of an ambassador.
- I'd like to see us more engaged with Council and Mayor.
- We would go speak to different groups about different subjects.
- We all represent constituencies.
- We each represent a stakeholder group or constituency, we should each be an ambassador to our respective constituencies.
- We already talked about individual Commissioners not speaking for the Commission, we should not be speaking for the city.
- This Commission doesn't have resources to support it, only have a staff.
- I need to know as Commissioner that I am supported by the city Council.

**If the Commission could only accomplish three things in the next year, what are they?**

- Look at city zones, or areas in the city that we think are priorities, again, trying to get to priority system.
- Start engaging department heads and getting them into what we're doing, so we have connections, internal education.
- Lines of communication aren't open, city light, SPU, DPD, parks, are all places to work on communication, will help our influence.
- Educating property owners, communicating benefits of urban forest.
- Maybe one of three goals is encouraging establishment of 5,000 trees in tough places. Keyword is establishment, not planting.
- Like concept of internal/external. Come up with things that happen annually, something that will outlive us.
- Major institution overlay have flexibility to do what UW did with the hub, hospitals, have flexibility to cut what they want on site.
- Parks is the other group that has blanket exception in Ordinance, we need to revisit that as Commission.